United Nations E/AC.51/2007/2/Add.1

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
29 March 2007

Original: English

Committee for Programme and Coordination
Forty-seventh session
11 June-6 July 2007
Item 4 (c) of the provisional agenda*
Programme questions: evaluation

Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the in-depth evaluation of political affairs: electoral assistance

Summary

At its forty-fourth session, the Committee for Programme and Coordination requested the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) to undertake an in-depth evaluation of political affairs. The first report on subprogramme 1, on prevention, control and resolution of conflicts, was presented to the Committee at its forty-sixth session. The present evaluation is part of phase two of the in-depth evaluation and covers subprogramme 2, on electoral assistance. It focuses on the structure, activities and achievements of the Electoral Assistance Division, which is responsible for implementing subprogramme 2.

While requests for United Nations electoral assistance have fluctuated since 1989, a general upward trend in their number has been observed, and the Division has been able to meet a majority of those requests. By doing so, it plays a positive and important role as a facilitator in the development of democratic practices. The Division's mandate is considered both clear and relevant by its staff members and partners. However, interpretations of how to carry out the mandate differ, owing to a lack of clear and formal guidelines for the Division's work. In addition, current systems to capture and share the Division's institutional memory are inadequate, as only partial steps have been taken to address this component of its mandate.

The Division's United Nations and non-United Nations partnerships for electoral assistance are strong, and both types of partners have expressed satisfaction with the quality of its work. However, increased coordination, communication and regular interaction with these partners could further benefit the provision of electoral assistance to Member States.

* E/AC.51/2007/1.

07-29050 (E) 230407

Internally, the Division needs strengthening in several areas. It draws from the roster of experts on electoral assistance, which is a reservoir of knowledge and capacity. However, current technological and administrative constraints hinder its more effective use. The Trust Fund for Electoral Observation does not meet the Division's current needs. Furthermore, while steps are being taken to strengthen the Division's internal structure and organizational culture, enhancements of internal work processes are needed to further improve performance.

OIOS makes six recommendations to the Division and the Department of Political Affairs:

- To formulate clear and precise guidelines for all work processes
- To develop a knowledge-management system to serve as a platform for the systematic collection of institutional memory on electoral assistance
- To further strengthen coordination with its United Nations partners
- To select an electronic format for converting the roster of experts and for facilitating partners' access to such information
- To develop a long-range strategic plan that takes into account emerging demands for electoral assistance worldwide
- To initiate steps to review the guidelines for the Trust Fund for Electoral Observation, so that they are better suited to the Division's current needs.

Contents

		Paragraphs	Page
I.	Introduction	1–3	4
II.	Methodology	4–5	4
III.	Background	6–7	5
IV.	Evaluation findings	8–52	5
	A. While requests for United Nations electoral assistance have fluctuated since 1989, a general upward trend can be observed, and the Electoral Assistance Division has been able to meet a majority of those requests	8–10	5
	B. The Electoral Assistance Division plays a positive role as facilitator in the development of democratic practices	11–13	7
	C. The Division's mandate is both clear and relevant, but interpretations about how to fulfil the mandate differ owing to a lack of clear and formal guidelines for the Division's work	14	8
	D. Systems to capture institutional memory are inadequate, and only partial steps have been taken to address this component of the Division's mandate	15–18	8
	E. Division partnerships are strong, but increased coordination and communication could further benefit the delivery of electoral assistance	19–38	9
	F. The roster of electoral assistance experts is a reservoir of talent from which the Division draws, but administrative and technological constraints hinder its more effective use	39–45	15
	G. While steps are being taken to strengthen the Division's internal structure and organizational culture, enhancements of internal work processes are needed to further improve performance	46–50	17
	H. The Trust Fund for Electoral Observation does not meet the Division's current needs	51–52	18
V.	Conclusion	53–54	18
VI.	Recommendations	55–63	19

I. Introduction

1. At its forty-fourth session, the Committee for Programme and Coordination requested the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) to undertake an in-depth evaluation of political affairs.[1] The political affairs programme is implemented by the Department of Political Affairs. It is divided into the following subprogrammes:

- Subprogramme 1, on the prevention, control and resolution of conflict, implemented by four regional divisions (Africa I, Africa II, Americas and Europe, Asia and the Pacific)
- Subprogramme 2, on electoral assistance, implemented by the Electoral Assistance Division
- Subprogramme 3, on Security Council affairs, implemented by the Security Council Affairs Division
- Subprogramme 4, on decolonization, implemented by the Decolonization Unit
- Subprogramme 5, on the question of Palestine, implemented by the Division for Palestinian Rights

2. OIOS submitted a report on subprogramme 1 to the Committee at its forty-sixth session in 2006. OIOS is submitting reports on the remaining four subprogrammes, a summary report and a report on special political missions administered and supported by the Department of Political Affairs to the Committee at its forty-seventh session in 2007. The present report covers subprogramme 2, on electoral assistance.

3. The purpose of the present in-depth evaluation is to determine the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and impact of the Department of Political Affairs in relation to its objectives under subprogramme 2. It focuses on the structure, activities and achievements of the Electoral Assistance Division, which is responsible for implementing the subprogramme.

II. Methodology

4. In conducting its evaluation, OIOS utilized a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods, including self-administered surveys, online surveys, in-depth interviews in person and/or by telephone, programme data analyses and literature review. The evaluation findings are based on the following data sources: a self-administered survey of Electoral Assistance Division staff members;[2] an online survey of a non-random sample of United Nations and non-United Nations partners;[3] an online survey of a random sample of electoral experts;[4] 16 interviews with Electoral Assistance Division staff members; 16 interviews with United Nations

[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 16* (A/59/16), para. 382, and General Assembly resolution 59/275, para. 22.

[2] The survey was conducted in November and December 2006. Of 17 staff members, 14 responded, for an 82 per cent response rate. This source will be referred to as the "staff survey".

[3] The survey was conducted in December 2006. Of 29 partners, 11 responded, for a 38 per cent response rate. This source will be referred to as the "partner survey".

[4] The survey was conducted in December 2006. A total of 27 of 38 experts responded, but only 11 completed the survey, for a 26 per cent response rate. This source will be referred to as the "expert survey".

partners; 6 interviews with non-United Nations partners; 3 interviews with electoral assistance experts; 11 interviews with electoral authorities or proxy;[5] 2 case-study analyses of Liberia and Nigeria;[6] and a desk review of relevant literature.

5. The evaluation has several limitations. Some electoral authorities interviewed were unable to distinguish between the Electoral Assistance Division and other United Nations partners, just seeing one United Nations.[7] This contributed to the problem of attributing impact resulting from electoral assistance provided by the United Nations to the Division's specific activities. Also, response rates to the surveys of United Nations and non-United Nations partners were low. Factors that may have influenced low response rates include survey fatigue, time limitations and the transitory nature of electoral assistance work.

III. Background

6. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 46/137, in 1992 the Secretary-General appointed the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs as the focal point for all electoral assistance activities. The Division's role is to support the focal point to carry out his functions, while its overall objective is to render electoral assistance to Member States at their request and in accordance with the relevant decisions of the Security Council and the Assembly, through the provision of the technical and advisory support necessary for holding periodic and fair elections.

7. The Division has 16 posts; one D-2, one D-1, three P-5, four P-4, two P-3, one P-2 and four General Service staff members.[8] The Director of the Division reports directly to the Under-Secretary-General of the Department of Political Affairs, who is the United Nations focal point for electoral assistance activities. In July 2006, a new Director came to the Division and initiated an internal assessment process, from which a proposal for team restructuring was made in December 2006.

IV. Evaluation findings

A. While requests for United Nations electoral assistance have fluctuated since 1989, a general upward trend can be observed, and the Electoral Assistance Division has been able to meet a majority of those requests

8. From 1989 to 2006, a total of 391 requests for electoral assistance from 106 Member States were submitted to the Electoral Assistance Division for consideration.

---

[5] There were three interviews conducted that may be considered proxy. Interviews were conducted with United Nations Development Programme or Department of Peacekeeping Operations partners to describe the electoral assistance provided by the Electoral Assistance Division.

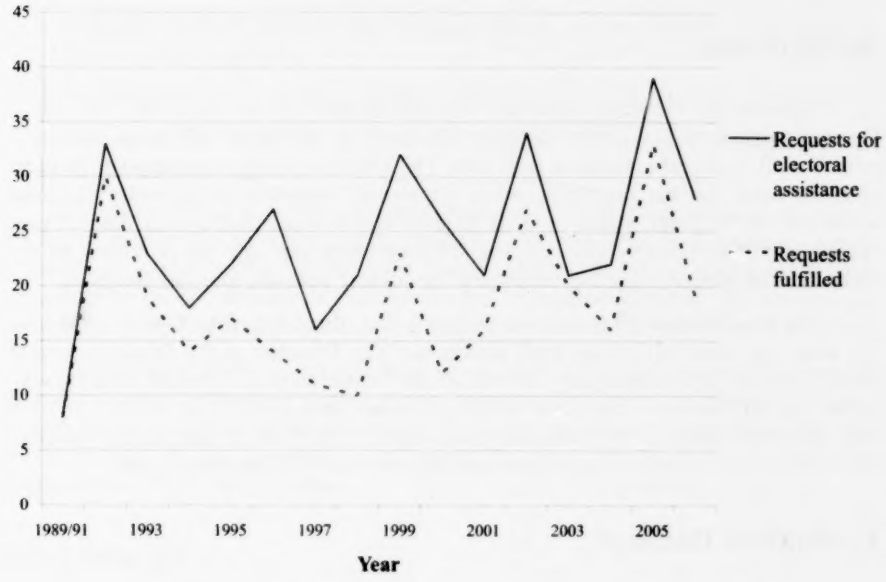
[6] The case-study analysis was conducted in partnership with the Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service of New York University.

[7] However, electoral authorities in Latin America who cooperated with the United Nations Development Programme and the Electoral Assistance Division actually knew what the Division was.

[8] The information about posts comes from the Division's approved budget for 2006-2007. There is a discrepancy between the total number of posts in the Division and the number of staff surveyed or interviewed, owing to one P-3 vacancy being filled during the data-collection process.

In that time, a general increase can be noted: from 8 requests in 1989 to 28 requests in 2006. Of the 391 requests, the Division provided assistance to 289 (74 per cent of all requests). The figure illustrates fluctuations in electoral requests since 1989, owing to several countries holding their first democratic elections in 1992 (mostly in Africa) and 1999 (mostly in Asia), a marked increase in requests for technical assistance (see A/54/491), and a growth in intra-State conflicts prompting a need to support post-conflict elections in 2002 and 2005. OIOS notes that the Division has a constant workload throughout the year; when election demands are high, its workload increases even further.

Number of requests for electoral assistance and requests fulfilled (1989-2006)



9. The table shows the number of countries that requested electoral assistance from 1989 to 2006 and the number of countries in which the Division provided assistance, including those under consideration.[9] By region, Africa ranks highest in both the number of requests and the assistance provided, followed by Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean. For the 2007 electoral calendar, roughly 30 per cent of the Division's global ongoing operations are in countries that have large Department of Peacekeeping Operations missions.[10]

[9] The reporting period covers 1989 to 2006, including three requests currently being considered. Of the 106, 102 are Member States and 4 are non-member States. Some States requested and/or received assistance more than once. The table is based on Division records.

[10] Figure based on Division records.

Number of countries, by region, that requested and received assistance from the Electoral Assistance Division (1989-2006)

Region	*Number of countries requesting assistance*	*Number of countries assisted by the Electoral Assistance Division*
Africa	48	47
Latin America and Caribbean	20	19
Asia	20	19
Eastern Europe	14	11
Western Europe	2	2
Other	2	1
Total	**106**	**99**

10. The operating context, determined by factors such as security, internal politics, political party integrity, historical legacy of transparency and literacy rates, greatly influences the extent to which effective electoral assistance can be delivered. The administrative capacity of autonomous electoral authorities also affects the successful holding of elections; capacity depends on the existing infrastructure in a country, logistical capacity (including use of information technology) and experience enforcing laws to promote credibility, converting political will into committed financial support, and working with and guiding media outlets. In spite of such factors, reports from electoral authorities suggest that a strengthened capacity to execute electoral operations and an enhanced commitment to the democratization process have developed over recent years.

B. The Electoral Assistance Division plays a positive role as facilitator in the development of democratic practices

11. OIOS notes that electoral stakeholders are generally satisfied with the quality of electoral assistance provided by the United Nations. United Nations and non-United Nations partners and electoral experts also agree that the Electoral Assistance Division carries out its mandate effectively. Notably, the Division's partners perceive that it is well-placed within the Department of Political Affairs to provide such support. Partner interviews also reveal that the electoral assistance provided by the Division is comprehensive, legitimate and independent, and in cases where it facilitates electoral assistance in post-conflict contexts, the Division plays an instrumental role, as the electoral authorities are unable to organize and carry out elections by themselves. However, a few partners note that additional resources are needed, particularly in the early stages of conducting elections.

12. Electoral authorities interviewed in Africa, Asia and the Middle East describe a range of assistance received from the Division, from carrying out the elections with electoral authorities to providing technical assistance in multiple areas, including facilitating observation. Depending upon the extent of their exposure to electoral assistance, the functioning of electoral authorities varies, ranging from ad hoc to more institutional or even independent. Electoral authorities interviewed were normally positive and hopeful when reflecting on future elections in their countries.

13. In Latin America, electoral authorities describe the nature of the Division's assistance as targeted at enhancing transparency, strengthening civic education and promoting participation of citizens. Interviews with these authorities reveal that assistance by the Division helps promote transparency and create in-country capacity. Though electoral authorities report high levels of satisfaction with the Division's expertise in electoral assistance, they point out the need for it to adapt to the changing priorities and challenges inherent in contemporary electoral processes. For example, countries that have acquired the capacity to organize and carry out elections currently require other types of assistance, such as the introduction of electronic voting, the refinement of legal electoral systems and the further promotion of transparency. OIOS recognizes that the Division is currently addressing such issues in its restructuring, paying closer attention to emerging and newly relevant electoral matters.

C. The Division's mandate is both clear and relevant, but interpretations about how to fulfil the mandate differ owing to a lack of clear and formal guidelines for the Division's work

14. Staff perceptions about mandate relevance are positive, as all staff rate it as good or excellent; equally, 90 per cent of partners rate mandate relevance as excellent or good. The majority of staff also rate mandate clarity as good or excellent, although a few rate it as fair. In staff interviews, it became clear that there are variable interpretations about how the mandate should be carried out. Some staff members expressed concern at the lack of a unified strategy in the Division to carry out electoral assistance; they indicated that the decision to provide electoral assistance is not guided by a formal policy, criteria or long-term strategy. Once the decision to provide electoral assistance has been taken, there is also no framework to determine the type of assistance that can be provided. Similarly, partner survey respondents note that the priorities for the Division when responding to requests for electoral assistance are not detailed or are unclear. Partner interviews also emphasize that there are no guidelines to direct the Division's work.

D. Systems to capture institutional memory are inadequate, and only partial steps have been taken to address this component of the Division's mandate

15. In its resolution 46/137 (para. 9), the General Assembly declared that the mandate of the Electoral Assistance Division was "to build on experience gained and to develop an institutional memory" on electoral assistance. In 2000, training materials, including a CD-ROM, were developed for international observers and United Nations staff. In 2003, the Division, the Carter Center and the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, initiated the formulation of the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and the Code of Conduct for International Election Observers, both of which were endorsed by numerous countries and international organizations from 2005 to 2006. In 2004, the Division and the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women co-produced a handbook entitled *Women and elections: guide to promoting the participation of women in elections*. These products are substantive and relevant, but, with the exception of the Code of Conduct, they do not

sufficiently constitute a systematic, institutionalized effort for collecting and disseminating electoral knowledge. Also, the Division does not have information on how useful those products and contributions have been to users.

16. Internally, Division staff acknowledge that the lack of a system to capture institutional memory is a shortcoming; a formal system to collect, share and disseminate experiences in electoral assistance is missing. Staff express dissatisfaction with the level of effectiveness in carrying out the following activities:

(a) collecting institutional electoral knowledge;

(b) categorizing and analysing institutional knowledge so as to ensure ease of access, assimilation of lessons learned and experiences and continual review of policy trends;

(c) sharing and disseminating institutional knowledge through technical papers, guidelines, manuals, training and seminars;

(d) promoting the sharing of knowledge and information between the United Nations and non-United Nations partners.[11]

Similarly, most staff stated that there was a need to review this core function. OIOS notes that the keenness of Division staff to review the function is currently reflected in the Division's current restructuring process (see para. 46 below).

17. Partner interviews emphasize that, given its global perspective, the Division plays a unique role in electoral assistance. Partner surveys and interviews also indicate that more documents could be produced for both United Nations and non-United Nations partners. They suggest that the Division develop documents on the history of electoral practices, lessons learned from different regions and major priorities to be considered when developing electoral programmes. They also mention that only the United Nations can develop guidance and subsequent standards against which to assess whether an election is credible and legitimate. Reference materials covering variations of how standards can be interpreted and what is considered legitimate are also requested, as are reflections on different electoral processes.

18. OIOS notes that regular and systematic data-collection systems could also be designed to examine several relevant areas, including to what extent Member States are satisfied with the Division's specific assistance, consultant views on what influences effective electoral processes, the usefulness and utility of standards and codes and the nature of the cooperation with United Nations and non-United Nations partners. OIOS believes that such information would enhance the Division's work.

E. Division partnerships are strong, but increased coordination and communication could further benefit the delivery of electoral assistance

19. Partnerships are an integral part of the Division's work. Its current partners include other divisions within the Department of Political Affairs, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the

[11] On average, 93 per cent of staff rankings for these activities fall within the "fair", "poor", or "very poor" categories.

Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the United Nations Volunteers programme (UNV) and the European Union. They also include partnerships with national and international non-governmental organizations, such as the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, the Carter Center, the International Foundation for Election Systems and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance.

Partnership with the Department of Political Affairs

20. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 46/137, in which the Assembly endorsed the view that a senior official in the offices of the Secretary-General should be designated to act as a focal point for electoral activities, the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs has been designated the focal point for all electoral assistance activities at the United Nations. One of the most important aspects of the Division's mandate is to advise the focal point on the possibility of providing electoral assistance. In providing that advice, some staff note that the Division should consider political analyses and advice from the other divisions within the Department of Political Affairs. Interviews suggest that analyses conducted in consultation with the other parts of the Department of Political Affairs are now more comprehensive. That contrasts with past years, in which the tendency in the Division was to provide advice to the focal point without consulting partners, and the Division had, in general, little contact with the other divisions in the Department.

21. OIOS observes that the Division's new management is promoting enhanced internal partnerships within the Department of Political Affairs. Partner and staff interviews reveal that informed decisions sent to the focal point are now shared and discussed with relevant regional divisions within the Department, and that Division desk officers are encouraged to ask for contributions and discuss their information and decisions with relevant Department colleagues. As a result, Division desk officers regularly consult with their regional division colleagues to produce notes, obtain information on a political situation, or decide on a course of action. Staff interviews indicate that when there is no such interaction, it is most often due to the fact that the exchange might take some time, thus delaying the provision of electoral assistance. OIOS believes that the continuation of this overall improvement in the levels of internal Department communication and exchange is necessary.

Partnerships with the United Nations Development Programme and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations

22. When providing in-country electoral assistance, the Division's two major partners are UNDP and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. The Division does not have the capacity to implement electoral assistance in the field, and for this reason these partnerships are of crucial importance. The Division partners with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations when a request for electoral assistance is made for a country in which a peacekeeping mission exists. The Division partners with UNDP when there is no peacekeeping component in the country to which assistance is going to be provided. In some cases, UNDP may also join the Division's partnership with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations for the provision of electoral assistance to a country with a peacekeeping mission. In all cases, but especially for the latter, partner surveys and interviews highlight that

coordination among all parties is crucial for the successful delivery of electoral assistance.

23. In both types of partnerships, the Division is responsible for conducting a needs assessment mission, a primary method for considering formal government requests for electoral assistance. The mission, consisting of a team of Division staff members, experts, other Department of Political Affairs stakeholders and other United Nations partners, assesses the electoral and political environment and the viability of the request. The mission may last up to 10 working days, after which a report is issued recommending whether assistance should be provided and, if so, the nature of the assistance warranted. Based on the report, the focal point for electoral assistance makes an informed decision on whether the assistance will be provided.

24. After the decision to provide assistance has been taken, Division and UNDP offices (both at Headquarters and at the country level) hold consultations to agree on the core principles of the assistance to be provided and jointly create an electoral assistance project document. Partner interviews highlight the importance of strong coordination at this stage to successfully implement the project. UNDP plays a crucial role in assisting project funding and takes the lead in project implementation. While the project is ongoing, the Division provides substantive advice as needed. OIOS recognizes that there is a note of guidance that stipulates the roles and responsibilities of the two agencies in the process (A/56/344, annex II).

25. UNDP partners characterize the relationship with the Division as good. Examples of important support provided by the Division to UNDP country offices include expert advice on electoral matters, relevant analysis and documentation on electoral projects and processes, as well as timely and appropriate mediation in delicate situations, such as in conflicts between contending parties or resistance to the participation of electoral observers.

26. Partner interviews and staff surveys and interviews reveal that the Division and UNDP have different perspectives about the provision of electoral assistance. UNDP and Division stakeholders mention that UNDP is a close partner of the Government and, as such, may not be as objective as the Division. Similarly, the stakeholders perceive the Division as being more concerned with maintaining electoral assistance standards, ensuring the impartiality of the United Nations and following credible electoral conduct. All such factors are considered indispensable to the effective delivery of electoral assistance. While UNDP respondents value the Division's role highly, such appreciation is contingent upon fluid dialogue leading to a common approach in providing the electoral assistance under review. Furthermore, the establishment of time frames to shorten the amount of time necessary to obtain the focal point's approval for an election project is viewed as an important step towards more effective collaboration between the two organizations.

27. OIOS notes that the partnership between the Division and UNDP could be further strengthened. Until recently, the two organizations often conducted their assessment missions separately; the Division did not typically involve UNDP country offices in either the needs assessment mission or the analysis contributing to the decision to provide electoral assistance. In the past, it was common for some offices to not receive the Division's assessment report. Partner and staff interviews describe the lack of a substantive consultative process between the two organizations, which sometimes leads to disagreements on the nature of electoral

assistance activities within a project. On its part, UNDP also failed to involve the Division in several important election-related projects.

28. OIOS recognizes that steps have recently been taken to improve coordination between the Division and UNDP, but that those steps need to be institutionalized. Even though there is a note of guidance on electoral assistance for the Division and UNDP, their staff indicate that the guide is not used regularly. Nevertheless, positive steps taken include more joint missions and the sharing of needs assessment mission reports and focal-point decisions. On the part of UNDP, current efforts to improve coordination and communication include the involvement of the Division in the preparation of an implementation guide on electoral assistance. UNDP also expressed interest in working in partnership in the areas of defining electoral standards and evaluating elections.

29. The Division works in partnership with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations in countries that have a peacekeeping mission in place. In those cases, the Department plays a political, logistical and administrative role, while the Division has the substantive lead. It has the responsibility of conducting the needs assessment mission to inform the focal point's decision on whether to provide electoral assistance. Partners say that the Division, in coordination with desk officers of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the electoral unit in the mission, provides expert advice and substantive support to the electoral unit in the mission, communicating and working closely; coordinates the recruitment of personnel who form the electoral component of the mission through the Division roster of experts; and provides input to the budget of the electoral component of the mission, on the basis of the mandate given by the Security Council to the mission.

30. The relationship between the Division and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations is described by Department respondents as very good, and stakeholders emphasize the Division's professionalism in organizing elections. According to Department interviews, the strong partnership has resulted in good staffing of the missions; the achievement of difficult milestones in the electoral process, such as the registration of large numbers of people for elections in difficult circumstances; the provision of appropriate training; and deployment of a large number of polling stations in countries lacking infrastructure.

31. OIOS observes that the Department's recruitment process affects the Division's effectiveness in conducting its work, as some Division staff members consider it long and cumbersome. The Division needs to deploy electoral experts on very short notice; however, the Department's administrative procedures take, on average, two months from the time the request from the mission is received to the placement of the expert. OIOS notes that the length of the recruitment process is dictated by the rules and regulations of the United Nations and is not due to the inactivity of the Department. In addition, some Division stakeholders mention that problems have arisen during the Department's administrative dealings and follow-up to the hiring processes.

32. In addition to addressing these administrative issues, better coordination between the Department and the Division would help increase efficiency in the delivery of electoral assistance. Department and Division staff members themselves and case study analysis suggest that effectiveness would increase through (a) the creation of a clear coordination framework and reporting lines in cases where the Division is working with the Department and the UNDP country office is also

involved; (b) a clear delimitation of responsibilities among the parties offering assistance; and (c) greater coordination between the Division and the Best Practices Section of the Department in the identification of best practices in electoral assistance. In its report on the management audit of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations — substantive operations (AP2005/600/16), OIOS recommended a policy framework for cooperation, and the clear division of labour and costs, as well as procedures for resolving any conflicts in the area of electoral assistance projects on an urgent basis. In response to that recommendation, the Division plans to work with the Department to develop a policy framework.

Partnership with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs

33. In its report on the in-depth evaluation of the electoral assistance programme, OIOS describes a stronger working relationship between the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Division than currently exists (E/AC.51/1999/3, para. 13). The Department used to play a stronger support role for the Division. The lack of a current partnership may be due to the fact that the Department used to focus considerably more on technical cooperation activities, and some of the roles in the area of technical cooperation that it used to play are now taken by UNDP and the United Nations Office for Project Services. Recently, contacts have been made again between the Division and the Department, and attempts to collaborate in common electoral projects are under way. The Department is interested in working on very specific issues, such as the prevention of pre- and post-electoral violence, an area in which it is currently conducting research. However, OIOS notes that, given the current re-orientation of Department priorities, the scope of cooperation between the two bodies is limited.

Partnership with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

34. Cooperation between the Division and OHCHR is limited. The two entities collaborated in the preparation of the needs assessment mission and a subsequent report for the provision of electoral assistance in Sierra Leone, an experience described by both parties as good. However, OIOS could not identify other examples of collaboration between the Division and OHCHR, even though OHCHR partners emphasize the usefulness of incorporating a human rights perspective in the Division's electoral work. This practice could help to identify issues that might hinder people's participation in the elections, provide advice on whether the courts are in a position to play the role of impartial judges on electoral disputes, and provide informed advice on whether the rights of freedom of expression of movement are respected. Such substantive areas can be identified and brought into needs assessment missions and electoral assistance processes.

Partnership with the United Nations Volunteers

35. The Division also works with UNV. Volunteers are used as resources for missions led by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to organize and carry out elections, particularly in post-conflict countries. Partner interviews indicate that this collaboration is strong, as each organization has a clear understanding of the other's role.

Non-United Nations partnerships

36. The Division also works in collaboration with non-United Nations partners. Among the regional organizations, the European Union has strengthened its own work in the area of electoral assistance, in the context of a general strategy aimed at promoting the rule of law and democratic freedoms. The European Union implements its own electoral assistance and cooperation projects in close partnership with UNDP. The Division's working relationship with the European Union is, in this sense, an indirect one, since it is mainly conducted through UNDP. As a consequence, a good working relationship between the Division and UNDP contributes to the effectiveness with which the European Union can conduct its own projects.

37. The Division also works in partnership with national and international non-governmental organizations. The international organizations with which the Division most frequently interacts are the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, the Carter Center, the International Foundation for Election Systems and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. When working together, stakeholders of both the Division and the organization note that the partnership is effective. Division staff highly value the electoral assistance expertise of the organizations, their willingness to cooperate, and their greater flexibility in recruiting valuable experts. Similarly, non-governmental organization stakeholders express their gratitude for the Division's assistance and describe its role in promoting and facilitating the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation as crucial. In interviews, the partners state that the symbolic endorsement of the Declaration by the United Nations through the participation of the Secretary-General, and the intergovernmental legitimacy that the Division has in the electoral field, are both essential. Some partners note that the Declaration has created a consensus among very different stakeholders.

38. Non-governmental organization stakeholders also highlight the Division's capacity to bring together major political donors and other stakeholders when providing electoral assistance at the country level. The Division's level of technical support is described as high quality. Furthermore, these organizations believe that the Division plays a crucial role by offering its good offices and advice and empowering other organizations in the process. Examples mentioned in some interviews with non-governmental organization respondents and the case-study analyses include the Division's good offices in facilitating interactions between international non-governmental organizations and the national electoral commission, which was critical to the success of the organizations' activities in providing electoral assistance. Another organization describes how the Division had identified a number of problems in the electoral process of a particular country and addressed those issues with the electoral authorities, ultimately preventing possible accusations of fraud in the elections. The Division also played a useful mediating role in convincing a Government to allow observers in its electoral process and helping ease tensions. Finally, the Division collaborated successfully with international non-governmental organizations by providing them with information about the electoral process and helping them to understand the particular context in which elections are held. The organizations interviewed say that all such activities helped them to perform effectively.

F. The roster of electoral assistance experts is a reservoir of talent from which the Division draws, but administrative and technological constraints hinder its more effective use

39. The Division maintains a roster of 1,200 international experts on electoral issues. Staff interviews indicate that the Division uses the roster systematically to (a) staff needs assessment missions with experts on specific electoral issues for which the Division has no specified knowledge; (b) provide the Department of Peacekeeping Operations with a list of candidates to staff electoral units of peacekeeping missions; and (c) propose names of experts to UNDP for its electoral assistance projects. The Division also clears United Nations Volunteers for peacekeeping missions. Assignments for experts may therefore vary from conducting needs assessment missions to providing expert advice on the organization of elections. Deployment may last anywhere from one week to several months. Expert survey data show that the experts are international, have extensive experience, are predominantly male and have graduate-level degrees. According to Division records, 70 per cent of all experts are male and come from the following regions: Africa (15 per cent), Asia and the Pacific (13.2 per cent), Middle East (2.4 per cent), Europe (37.1 per cent), Latin America and the Caribbean (9.8 per cent) and North America (22.4 per cent).

40. While certain established procedures and practices guide expert-selection processes, OIOS observes three constraints that prevent the effective use of roster experts. First, the urgent and transitory nature of electoral work makes organizing and deploying large teams for missions led by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations challenging and shortens the timespan between offering a consultancy and the date when the expert is supposed to travel. Second, the current personnel and administrative systems of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations are not flexible enough to deploy experts on short notice. As mentioned above in paragraph 31, OIOS notes that the length of the recruitment process is dictated by the rules and regulations of the United Nations. Third, often the best response to the need of a Member State is to deploy an expert on a consultancy for a short period. Experts are therefore hired on special service assignment contracts which, under current rules, preclude them from working with the Secretariat for six months after their contract has lapsed.[12] As a result, the Division experiences difficulties when staffing short-term assignments, because if experts accept an assignment under a special service assignment contract, they are precluded from working in missions run by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations for at least six months, which may prevent them from applying for work with the Division.

41. The majority of expert survey respondents rate the Division positively; it is seen as providing clear and comprehensive terms for assignments and sufficient briefing about the nature of the electoral and political context prior to departure. Experts also describe the working culture on teams as inclusive and participatory, mentioning also that they respect how national partners are featured as prominent stakeholders.

[12] See ST/AI/2006/3, para. 5.6 (b). The Department of Political Affairs and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations interpret the rule differently, as it does not specify whether missions led by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations are included.

42. Within the Division, two staff members are primarily responsible for entering and organizing expert data and carrying out the selection process. There is general consensus that two staff members are insufficient for this work.[13] Staff and partners state that, in order to maintain the Division's roster and facilitate access of United Nations partners to it, additional support is warranted.

43. The roster is intended to fulfil the needs of electoral experts in both UNDP and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, a requirement that poses a challenge when selecting an electronic database system accessible to all organizations and that integrates with each organization's different recruitment procedures. OIOS recognizes that the Division is currently in the process of addressing this concern. As noted in the OIOS report on the management audit of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations — substantive operations (AP2005/560/05), to date the system encapsulating all roster-related data on consultants has not been converted into electronic format. The report recommended that as soon as funds became available, the Division should implement the project of transforming the manually managed roster of experts into a web-based roster on an urgent basis. In response to that recommendation, the Division has proposed to contract a consultant systems analyst to assess and recommend appropriate solutions for the development and migration to an online roster system.

44. The Division's practice of using the same experts repeatedly, particularly for matters relating to the delivery of electoral assistance and cooperation in larger Department of Peacekeeping Operations missions, has an unintended positive effect. Experts become seasoned and well-suited for the ever-changing challenges of delivering electoral assistance. Teams, which are often composed of the same individuals, become accustomed to working together, a practice that strengthens the delivery of electoral assistance by building on past experiences from other contexts and countries. Partners and staff indicate that such a practice helps experts to develop and sustain a strong competitive edge, as noted by electoral authorities, who highly praised consultant competencies as well as the quality of the electoral assistance. However, OIOS notes that this practice does not adequately ensure that the United Nations consistently has access to, and builds, a wider pool of potentially qualified candidates.

45. OIOS notes that the knowledge gained from the above-mentioned teams is not captured systematically. Experts suggest that knowledge could be better captured and institutionalized by requiring a review of the appropriateness and sustainability of certain electoral assistance modalities. Furthermore, OIOS notes that the Division should regularly conduct evaluations of the work of the teams in order to capture lessons learned. Lastly, though there is a deliberate effort to cultivate consultants to deliver effective electoral assistance, OIOS observes that there is no platform by which they can voice their concerns.

[13] OIOS is not able to verify this assertion.

G. While steps are being taken to strengthen the Division's internal structure and organizational culture, enhancements of internal work processes are needed to further improve performance

46. the Division's current structure is such that staff members work on country portfolios and are assigned a certain number of countries on which to work. As the number of requests for electoral assistance fluctuates over time, so does the number of assigned countries a desk officer handles. Despite such fluctuations, OIOS notes that the staff workload is consistently high. In response to past staff concerns about the equity of portfolio allocations, the Division is undertaking a restructuring process. As part of that process, on 21 December 2006, the Division Director presented a proposal to the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs for the creation of three teams: (a) country-support; (b) strategic partnerships and resource mobilization; and (c) policy and institutional memory. The Division has not yet formally adopted the new structure, and it is acknowledged that the proposed teams will be subject to change. However, OIOS believes that a team-based approach is reasonable and appropriate, given the nature and scope of the Division's functions.

47. The ratio of General Service staff to Professional staff (including the Director) in the Division is one to three. This is much higher than the average ratio in the Secretariat of 1.36 General Service posts to 1 Professional post proposed for the biennium 2006-2007 (A/60/6 (Introduction), para. 22). The Division is currently requesting two additional General Service staff members to address the imbalance.

48. In view of these recent changes, most staff are currently optimistic about the senior leadership within the Division. A new Director started shortly after the in-depth evaluation began in 2006. Staff interviews suggest that, under the previous leadership, the working environment was uninspiring owing to, inter alia, high workload, unpredictability of tasks, an inability to focus on tasks, and minimal direction offered about how best to approach the work when support was solicited. However, the Division's current working culture is rated highly by staff. The current leadership style emphasizes a form of collective thinking that is not only feasible, given the relative size of the Division, but also appropriate, considering that the Division's premise is to promote democracy on a global scale. Staff interviews and surveys indicate that most of the Professional staff members were consulted and solicited to participate and contribute actively, although the General Service staff members express a desire for greater involvement in strategy and policy discussions.

49. Staff interviews reveal that internal communication and interaction are positive, and most staff surveyed rate current lines of communication as excellent or good. Staff also say that they feel free to speak and ask questions without hesitation and that weekly meetings strengthen connections and contribute to staff cohesion. In the staff survey, most state that the lines of reporting are excellent and the approach used to address tasks, particularly those requiring joint decisions among colleagues, is based on interactive exchange. This approach is confirmed by staff survey results indicating that there is mutual respect for professional competencies. OIOS notes that, as a complement to clear and positive internal communication and interaction, staff motivation to perform efficiently and effectively is also strong: most staff survey respondents rate staff morale within the Division as high or very high.

50. Regarding work processes, OIOS notes that operational guidelines to carry out the Division's work are inadequate. Clearly written guidelines designed to orient

thinking at the operational level are virtually absent. For instance, in-depth interviews reveal that staff currently use an individual approach when reviewing electoral assistance requests, an approach that includes, but is not limited to, holistic views about elections in the democratization process, crisis prevention, sustainability of electoral activities and ideological consistency with the Division's larger objective. The approach is not documented in any way. The work environment inside the Division is such that staff are at liberty to take professional initiatives, and each staff member brings a different approach, drawing from his or her own knowledge. However, guidelines outlining what a staff member should consider when reviewing requests for electoral assistance are absent, which raises concerns about transparency and consistency in the Division's work processes.

H. The Trust Fund for Electoral Observation does not meet the Division's current needs

51. The Trust Fund for Electoral Observation was created in 1989 (a) to allow the Division to meet demands that are unexpected and not included in the budget for the previous biennium; (b) to cover the Division's research and development function, providing a consolidation and systematization of lessons learned, which in turn leads to the development of new approaches and pilot programmes also supported by the Trust Fund; and (c) to provide funds on an emergency basis for a first rapid response to electoral requests, in particular when UNDP and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations are unable to provide such funding (General Assembly resolution 46/137, para. 14). The Trust Fund balance has been steadily decreasing: from a balance of $2,454,161 in 2003, total reserves and funds balances at 31 December 2006 had decreased to $589,369. Division staff also express concern about the high overhead rate (15 per cent) that the United Nations applies to voluntary contributions (ST/AI/284, annex, sect. III.A, para. 1).

52. OIOS recognizes the Division's current efforts to explore fund-raising alternatives through its restructuring plan. OIOS also notes that Trust Fund resources are earmarked primarily for electoral observation activities, although the Division no longer conducts electoral observation unless specifically requested by the General Assembly or the Security Council. OIOS therefore concludes that, given its current guidelines, the Trust Fund is unsuited to the Division's current needs.

V. Conclusion

53. The Division's work in facilitating and/or providing electoral assistance is valued by Member States and other electoral stakeholders. Over the years, the demand for assistance has been steadily evolving, but the Division's commitment to helping Member States conduct elections has been unwavering. Nevertheless, systems for collecting and disseminating knowledge on electoral assistance are inadequate. More effective delivery of this part of the Division's mandate would benefit partnerships, strengthen the Division's role, and add value to current operations. Overall, the work with United Nations partners has been good, and through these partnerships, electoral assistance has been successfully provided. However, better coordination would further strengthen efficiency.

54. OIOS recognizes that the Division has experienced organizational challenges in the past, but current leadership appears to be stabilizing conditions and refocusing the Division's direction and efforts to enhance efficiency and effectiveness. These efforts are generally supported by Division staff.

VI. Recommendations

55. On the basis of the evaluation findings, OIOS makes the recommendations as set out below.

Recommendation 1

56. **The Electoral Assistance Division should formulate clear and precise guidelines to strengthen its work processes** (see finding C). Specifically, guidelines need to be developed for:

(a) Reviewing requests for electoral assistance;

(b) Assessing the type of electoral assistance to be provided;

(c) Determining how the electoral assistance should be provided.

Recommendation 2

57. **The Division should develop a knowledge-management system to serve as a platform for the systematic collection and dissemination of institutional memory on electoral assistance** (see findings D, E, and F). Such a system should serve two main purposes:

(a) It should guide Division partners' work in electoral assistance. The Division is ideally positioned to contribute to international efforts to produce and share relevant knowledge on various electoral issues. As such, OIOS suggests that the Division consider producing documents and sharing analytical documents on key electoral issues and continue discussions on the feasibility and desirability of the elaboration of election standards or principles;

(b) It should guide the Division's own work in facilitating or providing electoral assistance. Specifically, the Division should:

(i) Regularly collect and document good practices on cooperation with United Nations and non-United Nations partners;

(ii) In the specific context of electoral assistance provided in peacekeeping missions, collaborate with the Best Practices Section of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to systematically collect and disseminate lessons learned;

(iii) Regularly collect and document the knowledge of experts on the effectiveness of electoral assistance.

58. This recommendation complements the recommendation made by OIOS in 2006 in its management audit of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations — substantive operations (AP2005/560/05), that the Division should develop and

update on a continuous basis its institutional memory and share the lessons learned with Member States, other stakeholders and academia in general through printed media and the Internet.

Recommendation 3

59. **The Division should strengthen coordination with its United Nations partners to further enhance information sharing and make the delivery of electoral assistance more effective** (see finding E). OIOS recommends that the Division focus on:

(a) Institutionalizing coordination with the Department of Political Affairs, UNDP, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and OHCHR through regular meetings and consultations;

(b) Ensuring clear definition and understanding of roles and responsibilities between the Division, UNDP, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and any other partners involved in the delivery of electoral assistance by creating effective coordinating structures when necessary, including the delineation of current roles and responsibilities between the Division and UNDP by building on the note of guidance;

(c) Consulting with OHCHR to include human rights issues in the context of electoral assistance (such as those described in para. 34) when developing future electoral assistance activities.

60. This recommendation complements the recommendation made by OIOS in 2006 in its report on the management audit of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations — substantive operations (AP2005/600/16), that the Division and its partners develop a policy framework for cooperation with clear division of labour and costs, as well as procedures for resolving any conflicts in the area of electoral assistance projects on an urgent basis.

Recommendation 4

61. **As a follow-up to the OIOS report on the management audit of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations — substantive operations (AP2005/560/05), the Division should select an electronic format for converting the roster of experts and for facilitating partner access to electoral experts** (see finding F).

Recommendation 5

62. As discussed in paragraph 13 above, as more countries are refining their electoral processes, their demands for electoral assistance are evolving. Therefore, other types of assistance supporting the challenges of emerging electoral systems will be needed. **The Division should create a long-range strategic plan to address new electoral trends and changing assistance needs of Member States.** OIOS recognizes that, as part of current efforts to restructure, one team will be assigned to create strategies that meet new and emerging electoral demands.

Recommendation 6

63. **The Division should initiate steps to review the guidelines for the Trust Fund for Electoral Observation so that they better suit the Division's current needs** (see finding H).

(*Signed*) Inga-Britt **Ahlenius**
Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services